



COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT POLICY

(Policy Adopted: 16th March 2026 (Minute Number TC3581) Next Review: March 2029)

Good communication and effective engagement with the whole community is essential to achieving the Council's aims and objectives.

The aims of this policy are to increase transparency, provide information that is accurate, easily accessible, relevant and timely for the benefit of residents, partners, employees, stakeholders and visitors, to enable local people and groups to influence the development and delivery of services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities, and to encourage their participation in community events and activities.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- raise residents' awareness of services provided by the Council and the quality of service they can expect
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence in the Council's activities and their costs
- increase understanding of how to get involved with, or influence, Council policies and services
- raise the profile of Stonehouse as a wonderful town in which to live, work and play
- support elected members in their role
- encourage engagement with all sections of the community, particularly hard-to-reach groups and those often excluded
- increase interest and participation in community groups and activities such as Stonehouse in Bloom, Share & Repair, Stonehouse Community Climate Action Forum and Christmas Goodwill Fest
- ensure that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks, nor the reputation of the Council be adversely affected, by inadequate communications or failure to correct inaccurate information appearing elsewhere
- work towards and maintain compliance with the requirements of standard WCAG2.2.AA or any subsequent standard (as required by Assertion 10 of the Annual Governance Audit Return AGAR)

We will communicate and engage with:

residents, Councillors, Town Council staff, voluntary groups and organisations, local businesses, Stroud District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, local ward Councillors and constituency MPs, other public sector organisations, contractors and service providers, visitors, the local press and broadcast media.

We will communicate information about:

- Council, committee and working group elections, meetings, decisions and activities
- Council policies
- Council finances
- our services and those of other local authorities
- news and other information supplied to us about local facilities, groups and organisations
- public consultations and inquiries
- opportunities to participate in Council affairs and other community activities
- Data as required by the Local Government Transparency Code

We will communicate and engage by:

- Publishing a regular Council newsletter for residents: see Appendix I
- Displaying information in notice boards, via banners or other appropriate street display
- Responding to enquiries promptly and in full
- Communicating with the local press and broadcast media: see Appendix II
- Carrying out regular consultation: see Appendix III
- Communicating via the STC website: see Appendix IV
- Engaging in social media: see Appendix V
- Establishing a clear and consistent Council identity for the presentation and content of all communications

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES - SEE APPENDICES I-V

The members of the Town Council, its Officers and other employees, and individuals and organisations working with or acting on behalf of the Council are responsible for implementing and adhering to this policy.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with other relevant policies, including Bullying & Harassment Policy, Code of Conduct, Data Protection Policy and Equality & Diversity Policy.

MONITORING

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy we will:

- monitor the local press and broadcast media for items concerning or originating from the Town Council or the community of Stonehouse
- seek feedback from local groups, organisations and businesses with whom we communicate
- carry out periodic consultation to measure satisfaction in the community
- monitor participation in elections and other Council activities

APPENDIX I - NEWSLETTER

Stonehouse News will be published at least twice each year and will include news and information regarding past, current and forthcoming Council and community activities and events. Deadlines for articles and advertisements will be determined by the Communications Working Group and the Facilities & Communications Coordinator, to whom they should be addressed.

The format and distribution of the newsletter will be determined by the Facilities & Communications Coordinator and the Communications Working Group with the agreement of Business Committee.

If deemed necessary an interim newsletter will be published online, with paper copies available in selected outlets and for others in the community who may lack internet access.

APPENDIX II - LOCAL PRESS AND BROADCAST MEDIA

The Town Council will produce press releases, articles and information publicising events, stories or subjects concerned with, and having a positive impact on, Stonehouse residents, businesses, the community, the Town Council and the local environment.

The format of press releases will conform to current best practice.

The Town Council Office should be the first point of contact for all enquiries. Day to day enquiries will be dealt with by Council officers in consultation with the Town Clerk. Requests for comment or interview should be referred to the Town Clerk to determine a response, normally restricted to matters that have been agreed by the Town Council, in consultation with the Chair and/or Deputy Chair.

Quotes may be attributed to the Chair, Deputy Chair or other Town Councillors after consultation. Where possible, a draft response will be provided by the Town Clerk to the relevant Town Councillors.

Enquiries that are deemed to be party political will be directed to the relevant Town Councillor(s). Elected members should make their own arrangements for issuing party political material to the media and ensure that the material is clear that it does not emanate from the Town Council.

Any Councillor responding to a journalist in their personal capacity or as a representative of another group should state clearly that they are responding in that capacity and not as a Town Councillor.

Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. Members must take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Town Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct.

Employees other than the Clerk (or Deputy) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Town Council unless specifically authorised by the Town Clerk/Deputy Clerk or Chair/Vice Chair.

Copies will be retained of all communications with the media. Should there be a need to make an official complaint against a publication or broadcast the Town Clerk will be the first point of contact.

APPENDIX III

The Council is committed to consulting local residents, businesses and community groups, service providers and contractors, visitors and our own staff and Members, to identify ways in which we can improve the services we provide. We will:

- invite public participation in Council and Committee meetings
- encourage public membership of Working Groups
- invite local and community groups to participate in the formulation of specific policies
- publish questionnaires on major issues via printed media including Stonehouse News, social media and the website
- hold drop-in events in various locations in the town
- invite correspondence to the Town Clerk

APPENDIX IV

This policy also sets out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Councillors, staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications, referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Town Council website (Council is in the process of changing and working toward compliance with requirements of WCAG2.2.AA)
- Facebook and other social networking sites the council may use from time to time
- Website Comment Sections and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to town Councillors, Council staff and others communicating with the Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way as to other written or verbal communication.

Individual Town Councillors or Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity on Council social media pages. They should be mindful how comments may be perceived and must not bring the Council into disrepute.

In the main, Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used for formal and informal council activities.

Formal activities (Clerk and designated persons only including Communications Working Group)

- Distribution of Agendas, minutes and dates of meetings
- Policies, reports and projects
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other Councillors
- Vacancies
- Update Council Website
- Share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police Library, Health Authorities etc
- Announcing new information
- Advertise events and activities
- Notification of Press Releases
- Responding positively to resident's enquiries, comments, questions and suggestions.
- Seeking feedback from local groups, organisations and businesses with whom we communicate
- Carry out periodic consultation in the community to measure satisfaction with Council services/activities
- Monitor participation in elections and other Council activities.
- Other content which promotes and upholds the reputation of the Council.

Informal activities

- Sharing council news stories and information including updates of projects and activities
- Re-post from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health Authorities etc
- Directory of/information about local businesses

- Information concerning schools, churches, community organisations, doctors, dentists.
- Visitor information including history of the town and it's environs. Travel information etc.
- Local news
- Useful links
- Details of local events
- Reports of past events (any images will have appropriate consent)

Councillors, Officers and staff will not, as representatives of the Council

- Use social media to engage in debate with residents
- Comment on sensitive issues such as planning applications
- Publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute
- Publish any content for party political or specific campaigning purposes (LGA1986)
- Promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns.
- Publish any content that is abusive, hateful or that would put Council representatives in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct or any other policies

Members will make it clear any views expressed that differ from Council policy are their own personal views. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The Clerk to the Council is appointed as a moderator of Council media output, responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with this Policy.

The moderator will have authority to remove from Council social media pages any posts made by third parties deemed to be of a defamatory or libelous nature.